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SUBJECT Interview With Arkady Shevchenko

BRYANT GUMBEL: Since World War II, high-ranking Soviet officials who wanted to spies and then defect to the West usually have been caught and executed. But not all of them. With us this morning in our Washington studio is the highest-ranking Soviet official ever to defect to the West after spying for the CIA. He is Arkady Shevchenko, a former personal adviser to Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, who also served as Undersecretary General of the U.N. Mr. Shevchenko's story, which includes insight into the inner workings of the Kremlin, is told in his autobiography. It is entitled Breaking with Moscow.

Good morning and thank you for being with us.

ARKADY SHEVCHENKO: Thank you.

GUMBEL: You have said you never regarded yourself as a spy who betrayed his country. Why? Isn't that exactly what you were and what you did?

SHEVCHENKO: It's not exactly so, first of all, because it was not my intention to be what you call a spy. Initially, I once thought that it would last only for a few days or a few weeks, or something like that.

And then, you know, there is a spying and spying. There is a difference. Let's say would you call a spy some of the people who, under the Nazi regime when Hitler was in the power in Germany, who have been cooperating with Ally, with us? Does the German people now consider them spies, or not?

And there are some features in the Soviet system which is, in many aspects, as totalitarian as fascist Germany.

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GUMBEL: So you were passing along information because the CIA asked you to and that was the price for your freedom. Did you do this willingly?

SHEVCHENKO: No. It was a price for my freedom, because I had the reputation of being a hard-line Soviet. And out of the blue -- I understand that -- all of a sudden very high-level Soviet official comes. I didn't know whether American, in general, will accept me. So I had to find a way even to talk, to contact the United States Government through some of the friends. And it was a surprise for me, of course, when they asked me, "Would you stay in your position for a while?" I didn't understand what does it mean. And my first question was, "Do you mean I'm in spying," or something? And they told, "No. No, no. Don't call it exactly."

GUMBEL: Don't call it spying.

SHEVCHENKO: "Don't call it exactly."

I thought, you know, I'm not a James Bond, or something like that. I'm not prepared to do all this kind of thing.

They told, "No, no. Don't worry. This is not spying in the sense that you will be stealing something," and all this, you know, running in the car, shooting everywhere. But they asked me, you know, "Stay for a while in your present position."

GUMBEL: And you did.

SHEVCHENKO: And I stayed for a while, and then thought when, I mean, we will decide. Because it was not my intention to do that. My intention was to break with the Soviet government and to be here.

GUMBEL: Allow me to interrupt for a moment.

You were known, as you noted, as a Kremlin hard-liner, when in fact you were fed up with the system and ready to defect to the West. How many others are there like you inside the Kremlin?

SHEVCHENKO: You know, if we talk about inside the Kremlin, we will talk about the member of the Politburo, themselves. I doubt that there are people who share my view.

But at my level, I can assure that there is quite a lot of people who think similarly. But they cannot show any signs of that. Because if you will do that, that's the end of you. You will not only be fired, what is called in the West, lose your job, but you risk to happen, you know, to end your life in the

mental institution, or something like that.

So there are people who belongs to the Soviet political elite -- you know that the people who are artists or are dancer or writers, they have been expelled from the Soviet Union because of the lack of the freedom. But we also in politics.

What I can do? You know, when I discovered that I disagree essentially with the Soviet foreign policy on many things, I couldn't do anything. I had to be just a robot implementing what they wanted me to do.

GUMBEL: As you talk of the Politburo, you have noted that the idea of hawks and doves contesting for power inside the Politburo is a myth. Given that, does it make much difference who succeeds Chernenko?

SHEVCHENKO: You know, that's true. There is no such a thing like hawks, doves, and so on. But there are differences between the Soviets inside the leadership. They are united in their common goals. I mean about the eventual, if not this century, next century, of Soviet-style socialism and so on. They're united in that. Oh, sure. And from that point of view, I mean no hawks or -- but there are people who, let's say, wish, for the tactical reason, to attach more importance to the domestic problem of the Soviet Union. And there are those who are more, I mean, inclined for more adventure abroad, and so on. And it makes for us a difference who really would be in majority and who would be the leader in the Soviet Union.

GUMBEL: Well, then, let me ask you. Of Mikhail Romanov and Gorbachev, who do you think is more likely to succeed Chernenko?

SHEVCHENKO: One thing should be understood in the West and the United States, that no one knows who will succeed. Even, I'm sure at the present moment, even the member of the Politburo. Because it's never happened in the Soviet history that the people -- somebody who was considered to be a successor. It never happened after Stalin's death, after Khrushchev deaths, after Brezhnev deaths. It's somebody else, I mean who really emerged as a leader.

It's true, Gorbachev is one of the leading personality in the Politburo. He might be very well a successor. He belonged to what is called the young generation. He's 52. Romanov is 61. You know, in the Soviet Union the retirement age is 60. So when we're talking about the next generation of the Soviet leaders, we have to understand about what we are talking about. We're talking, actually, a man who is almost about to retire.

GUMBEL: One final note. We've only seconds left. Any moments when you've regretted your decision?

SHEVCHENKO: I never regretted my decision, but, of course, I have a pain. I love my country. What I hated was the regime. That's what I meant, always. And I will have always a pain in my heart. I will miss my country. And there are personal tragedy, because still I have my people...

GUMBEL: Son and a daughter.

SHEVCHENKO: ...daughter in Moscow. And that is, of course, something that will always be in my heart.

GUMBEL: Arkady Shevchenko, thank you very much for joining us, sir. Welcome aboard.